DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 225 634 JC 830 066

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TITLE Overcoming the Disincentives to Study Abroad. The RCC Israel Program: A Model.
INSTITUTION Rockland Community Coll., Suffern, N.Y.
PUB DATE 81
NOTE 15p.
PUB TYPE Viewpoints (120) -- Reports - Descriptive (141)

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS Community Colleges; *Educational Benefits; Foreign Countries; *Influences; Intercollegiate Cooperation; Program Descriptions; *Student Participation; *Study Abroad; Two Year Colleges
IDENTIFIERS *Israel

ABSTRACT

While there is general support for international and intercultural education, a number of obstacles inhibit student participation in study abroad programs, especially those in Israel. These disincentives include the following: (1) U.S. colleges are reluctant to accept credits from institutions over which there is no American academic supervision; (2) students have limited access to information about study opportunities in Israel, and they are hesitant to engage in study without prior assurance that credits earned abroad will be accepted in the U.S.; (3) students perceive study abroad as disruptive of their academic progress and irrelevant to their career goals; and (4) it is increasingly difficult for students to finance a year of study in Israel. Rockland Community College's (RCC's) Israel program was designed specifically to overcome these disincentives. Its model has two unique elements. First, students enroll in a U.S. institution, which issues credits and transcripts, actively recruits participants, provides financial assistance, and monitors academic standards. Second, through a process of academic brokering, the student is helped to find a university, college, or one of several other learning environments appropriate to his/her talents and interests. The success of the model is evidenced in the consistently high level of student enrollment in the program, the participation of students from over 30 colleges, and increased community consciousness of Israel and support of the program. (AYC)

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OVERCOMING THE DISINCENTIVES TO STUDY ABROAD

THE RCC ISRAEL PROGRAM:

A MODEL

by

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JC 830 066

1981

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
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OVERCOMING THE DISINCENTIVES TO STUDY ABROAD

THE RCC ISRAEL PROGRAM: A MODEL

by Stephen Beiner and Sue Commanday, 1981

International and intercultural education is no longer viewed by United States colleges and universities as a frill for an elite few of their students. Recognizing the increasing interdependence of countries, forward looking institutions of higher learning in the United States feel that those students who gain global literacy as part of their undergraduate education will have a competitive edge in the job market of the 80's. These institutions, now committed to using the world as teacher, send their students to study in many countries to gain those skills and sensitivities which will better equip them to live and work in the "world community" that is emerging.

No region in the world so nearly approximates the political and cultural vortex that moves international relations today as does the Middle East. Central to this area stands modern Israel, repository of the history of Western and Eastern man and a microcosm of all the forces and issues that are shaping and threatening civilization. It provides, therefore, a remarkable learning environment for American students of all persuasions, talents and interests.

The Israeli universities and their American representatives have to date attracted many students to study at their institutions. Other organizations, such as AZYF, have also been successful in sending numbers of college-age individuals to tour in and experience Israel. Without detracting from the successful efforts of these and other organizations and institutions, it is apparent that only a small percentage of students who potentially would be interested in study in Israel actually do participate in such a program.

Only a minute fraction of students study in Israel as part of their collegiate experience. The organizations presently recruiting students do not have internal or ready access to the colleges of the U.S., their students, and the power structure of their professoriate and administrators. Nor do prevalent strategies for identifying students on campus and meaningfully involving them in an Israel experience successfully overcome the multiplicity of disincentives which presently inhibit most students from including a period of study in Israel as part of their education.

Only an alliance forged between the agencies and organizations seeking to encourage students to study in Israel and American colleges and universities can overcome these disincentives.

What are the disincentives we must overcome?

Nine years of working closely with students, college faculty and administration, and community leaders have revealed the following obstacles to student participation in study programs in Israel:

1. U.S. colleges and universities are hostile to the notion of their students leaving their institutions, enrolling elsewhere, even temporarily, to complete a part of their degree programs abroad. The U.S. college or university loses tuition and/or funding when students register elsewhere. In days of diminishing enrollments and increased competion among institutions for the decreasing population of college-age students, programs that are perceived by U.S. colleges as competitive, in that they take students off their rolls, will be discouraged; students will not readily be allowed to transfer credits earned abroad towards their U.S. degrees. Only when a student maintains enrollment

in the U.S. institution does that institution encourage study abroad.

2. U.S. colleges and universities are reluctant to accept transfer of credits from institutions and programs over which there is no American academic supervision. Many universities will accept credits only if the program is in some way affiliated with their institutions, supervised by their faculty. However, university officials perceive that starting a program in Israel and monitoring it requires much time and expense, not the least of which is sending minimally one faculty member abroad to supervise the work and well-being of the students.

3. Students have limited access to current information about the multiplicity of study opportunities in Israel. Students and their parents require counselling by American academics who are familiar with the wide variety of study opportunities available in Israel and the precise differences between them, as well as with the American system of higher education. They seek counsel from individuals who have no vested interest in any particular program or institution in Israel, but rather desire only to match the student to the most suitable learning environment. Even in major U.S. cities with large college populations, such counselling is virtually unavailable.

4. Students are hesitant and often unwilling to engage in study abroad without the prior assurance that the credit they earn will be accepted by their U.S. college or university. Those who do study abroad often spend unproductive time while in Israel and upon their return attempting to negotiate credit transfer.

5. The programs which are best known by U.S. students and universities are elitist, in that they are designed for and enroll only students in the top 5-10% of their class. The large numbers of students in the U.S. who may be only slightly above average or average, therefore believe that there is no academic program in Israel which will accept them.

6. Students considering study in Israel, and their parents, want to have someone in Israel to help solve problems they envision may occur. Students frequently require academic guidance from an individual familiar with the American educational system and fear that while in Israel they will be unable to obtain information and assistance in re-entry to the U.S. educational system which they may require. Parents feel it may prove difficult in times of emergency to contact their child because of problems in communicating over great distances.

7. Many students perceive a year of study in Israel as exciting, but also as an interruption of their academic progress irrelevant to their ultimate career or professional goals.

8. With rising airfares and cost of living, students find it increasingly difficult to finance a semester or year of study in Israel. Most students who presently receive state and Federal financial aid and benefit from guaranteed student loans, must relinquish this assistance if they wish to study in Israel.

9. Most students presently reached by organizations and institutions recruiting for study abroad opportunities are those students who are affiliated with youth groups or whose parents

are members of Israel-affiliated organizations. The vast majority of "unaffiliated" students, those who would most benefit from an intense educational experience in Israel, are never reached with program information.

Rockland Community College, a unit of State University of New York, has created an Israel program designed specifically to overcome the above disincentives. This institution, located in a suburb of 260,000 people, presently sends between 200-300 students to study in Israel each year on semester or year programs. The success of the model developed by Rockland over the last eight years has been demonstrated by the large and increasing numbers of students electing to enroll in Rockland's program, and by the quality of the emotional and intellectual experience gained by these students.

The Rockland model has two unique elements: the use of a "sponsoring" U.S. college and the offering of a vast array of study opportunities in which a student may participate.

1. The student enrolls in a U.S. "sending" institution, and credits and transcripts are issued by the U.S. college or university, rather than the Israeli institution.

a. The U.S. colleges and universities in which the students are enrolled are sponsoring institutions of the Israel program and become active recruiters for it. Access to the student population and cooperation from the professoriate, the administrators, as well as the power structure-including community leaders and governing boards of trustees--is no longer a problem. The program of study in Israel becomes part of the U.S. institution's mission, rather than an

alternative educational opportunity that threatens to diminish the college's enrollment. Since the student enrolls and pays tuition to the U.S. institution, the college does not lose its budget support for students who are studying in Israel, and an important disincentive present in other approaches is removed.

b. Public college students have a fair share of their instruction in Israel supported by the public college budget as would be the case if they were studying on the home campus. The student pays regular tuition to the U.S. college and is considered in every way a home campus student. Since the college continues to receive its normal operating aid from its budget for each student studying in Israel, it pays a portion of the student's expenses for instruction in Israel, using a formula that provides support for the student abroad roughly equivalent to the instructional expense incurred for a home campus student.

c. An office staffed by a director, academics and counsellors exists in Jerusalem, to provide supervision of the academic and emotional well-being of all students.

d. Colleges and universities enrolling their students using this model are assured that their academic standards are met by the institution abroad since the Jerusalem office director moniters the work of all students; the expense of maintaining an on-site faculty member becomes unnecessary.

e. The student is assured of recognition and credit for the study in Israel before leaving, by being registered in a U.S. college that sponsors the program and issues U.S. credits and transcripts upon the student's successful completion of the program. The U.S. student is thereby assured in advance that the credits earned in Israel will be applicable to the U.S. degree towards which they are working.

f. The educational experience is seen as relevant to the student's degree program, as it is chosen in concert with college advisors familiar with the student's needs and able to help the student design programs which satisfy degree requirements.

g. A student is provided with academic, vocational and personal counselling both in the U.S. and in Israel, by American academics and counsellors, paid by the U.S. budget.

h. Parents are assured that there is an American office of the student's U.S. college which is responsible for him/her, which can easily be contacted in times of emergency, and through which their child may be immediately reached.

i. A student studying in Israel, in addition to receiving financial support from the sponsoring U.S. institution, continues to be entitled to whatever scholarship and financial aid he/she would receive is studying at the U.S. home campus.

2. Through a process called academic brokering the student is helped to find a university, college or other learning environment in Israel appropriate to his/her talents and interests. All of Israel is potentially used as a part of the student's curriculum,

which is not limited to any single institution, program or course.

a. College and University Study Programs. Students study at any of Israel's major universities or colleges. U.S. counsellors maintain academic liaison with all of Israel's universities and colleges and can both aid a student in selecting the institution best suited for him/her and help the student with the application process.

b. Specialized Schools and Institutions of Higher Learning. Israel has numerous colleges and institutions of higher education that offer programs and courses with a specialized focus. Some such programs prepare U.S. high school graduates for teaching positions, especially of Judaica in the U.S. and Israel. Many such institutions specialize in the teaching of ancient and modern Israel, Hebrew language and culture, and medieval and modern literature. Other programs offer a student the opportunity to study at a religious institution while pursuing "on contract" additional academic work enabling the student to earn credit in such subjects as Hebrew language, Talmudic literature Bible, Jewish history and philosophy.

c. Alternative Study Opportunities. As an alternative to study at an Israeli university or college, or in many cases in conjunction with such study, students are placed in educational settings that allow Israel to become the curriculum. These programs unite education and experience, so that the student is simultaneously learning, doing, acting

and feeling. Such programs combine formal classroom lectures, independent study and fieldwork. A student wishing to explore a particular area of study may be assigned to a qualified Israeli expert in that field who serves as a mentor through an "academic contract." Other programs offer a student the opportunity to learn about Israel, its culture and its people "from the inside" by spending some period of their study in a field-work experience living on kibbutz, moshav, or development town in addition to their formal classroom work.

d. Service Learning Programs. Service learning academic programs are designed to permit students to earn college credits by working in their field of study and having such work experience form an integral part of their academic program. Service learning is designed for students who wish to combine classroom instruction with practical work experience. In service learning, the teacher is the mentor who helps each student design an individualized learning program, the core of which is the work experience in the student's chosen field. A learning contract between the student and mentor serves as the basis of instruction and includes an appropriate mix of work and service, individual and group tutorials, seminars, and directed independent study.

e. Individually Designed Study Programs. Individually designed programs are those wherein the student chooses the setting for his/her period of residence in Israel, based on

his/her specialized academic interest or research design. The setting is not in itself academic; it is not an institution of higher learning, nor is it a program organized primarily to teach. Rather, it is an environment which provides the raw material for the student's experience. Such a setting may be a job in a busy hotel, a position on an Israeli newspaper, service as a camp counsellor or recreation director, or an apprenticeship to a designer of stained glass. The learning environment may be a development town, a border settlement, a contested settlement in occupied territory, a kibbutz or moshav where the student chooses to live. This raw material becomes the basis for an academic contract, which focuses the student's attention on various aspects of his/her experience, requires analysis and study, reading, exploration of theory and meaning. A student in one or another of the above-mentioned settings can effectively study, for example, hotel management, tourism, journalism, recreational programming and administration, social problems and dynamics of development towns, politics and sociology of newly formed settlements.

The above model is not an abstract idea, or potentially promising program design. The proven success of this approach is perfectly clear:

1. Rockland has consistently over the last six of its nine years of offering an Israel program sent between 200-300 students to study on long-term programs, making it the largest U.S. program

of its kind.

2. Over thirty U.S. colleges spanning the U.S. from Massachusetts to California, from Florida to Arizona have formed the College Consortium for International Studies (CCIS), enroll students on their campuses and send their students to Israel to study through the Rockland model and apperatus.

3. Rockland's offices in New York and Jerusalem, staffed by American academics and counsellors, provide unique support services for its students and those of the Consortium colleges:

- counselling of students to find an appropriate educational institution or learning opportunity in Israel
- counselling of students to find a U.S. host college or university offering the opportunity to study in Israel
- program development for students, academic departments and individual faculty members
- institution and community consultants for program initiation and development
- student pre-departure counselling and orientation
- academic, personal and transfer counselling of students while abroad
- program evaluation and control.

4. The success of Rockland's Israel program has led to increased community consciousness of Israel as well as to the desire of many students to continue their studies in the U.S. Many students, stimulated by their year in Israel, want subsequent study in Judaism and the Middle East, or related areas in which they

became interested due to their study abroad; others desire a preliminary year of study before their departure, which usually has a "multiplier effect" in terms of the benefits derived from their study in Israel. Such response to Rockland's Israel program has led to the creation of an on-campus Israel and Judaic Studies program that serves several hundred students and community members each year. A Rockland student can now earn an Associate degree in International Studies through a combination of four semesters of Israel-based and campus-based studies.

A valuable development has been the growing interest of the local community in relating to the programs: in diffusing information about them through local religious and secular agencies, and most recently in raising funds for those students who need help with airfare to and expenses in Israel. By hosting speakers and cultural events on Israel and using income so generated for student travel to Israel, community leaders believe they are simultaneously raising local consciousness, supporting Israel and strengthening local public education by adding the dimension of international experience.

The experience and the model developed by Rockland and used by the Consortium colleges can be used by other colleges to send their students to Israel. In some measure, the mechanism for expanding the use of this model has already been created. In hopes of using this approach and

duplicating its successes nationally and internationally, the Center for Study in Israel was formed, as an independent non-profit corporation, privately funded. Advised by distinguished academics, and led by a full-time director, its purpose is to implement those strategies that will continue to increase the number of U.S. students studying in Israel, to improve the quality of thier educational experience while they are there, and to expand the opportunities available to them.

Using the assistance of the Center, colleges and universities wishing to make study in Israel immediately available to them, can now do so.

The Center staff is prepared as well to consult with institutions that desire to design additional options for their students and/or faculty. Inquiries should be directed to:

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